

# Officials pledge to demand cash for Highlands

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MORRISTOWN - The new federal budget still doesn't include promised money to buy and preserve the water-generating Highlands, but New Jersey's representatives who spearheaded supporting legislation are upbeat.

"Let me assure you, the passage of the Highlands funding authorization will be a priority," Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-Harding, told conservation leaders from four states at an awards luncheon earlier this week.

The federal Highlands Conservation Act was signed by President Bush last year shortly after former Gov. Jim McGreevey signed the state's Highlands preservation law. That measure severely restricts large-scale development across 395,000 acres in North Jersey's Highlands.

Frelinghuysen was honored by the activist Highlands Coalition during the event at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum on Monday. He said congressional supporters who won passage of the landmark law "are going to be relentless" in securing funds.

The act authorizes Congress to match \$100 million in state open-space acquisition funds over 10 years. It also authorizes an additional \$10 million for acquisition planning in the Highlands, a mountainous forested region of 13.5 million acres across North Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut. The region provides water for 11 million residents and is home to an array of wild-life.

The Highlands conservation law was shepherded through Congress by New Jersey representatives. Frelinghuysen helped write the House bill. Democratic Sens. Jon S. Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg sponsored the Senate version.

Corzine, who was also honored at the luncheon, lauded local officials and civic groups for creating a wave of public support for conservation actions.

"This is hopefully just the first step" of federal actions, said Corzine. "This is one of the proud moments of my Senate career."

Lautenberg, who had another commitment, sent a statement praising the grass-roots campaign for "convincing the entire country that our Highlands is an area of national significance and that we all have an obligation to preserve it."

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